



U.S. Embassy, Wellington

Remarks by Ambassador Charles J. Swindells
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Thank you.

Let me begin by stating that I understand all too well that there are people – probably some of you here today – who disagree with various policies and actions of the U.S. in recent times. I'm here today to try to explain some of those policies, and perhaps correct some misconceptions.

Now, one of the things I have enjoyed most about representing the United States in New Zealand has been getting to know this beautiful country and meeting New Zealanders of every walk of life. It has been very satisfying to use these opportunities to further the close ties that exist between our two peoples and create better understanding of the United States, especially the policies and objectives of my government.

Most recently, that effort has focused on our stance toward Iraq, and so I'd like to begin there.

As all of you know, the United States and a number of other nations – 40 in all – successfully concluded the arduous but necessary task of liberating Iraq just over 6 months ago.

In this battle, we fought for the defense of our nation and for the cause of liberty and peace in Iraq. For the United States, the liberation of Iraq was not only an important step in stabilizing the region, but also a crucial advance in the global campaign against terror.

With the collapse of the regime in Baghdad, we have removed a dangerous ally of terrorism, and cut off a source of terrorist funding and weaponry. No terrorist network will gain weapons of mass destruction or financing from the Hussein regime, because that regime has been removed from power.

And just to address the irresponsible charge that the Coalition went into Iraq for oil, let me say that it would have been a lot cheaper – in dollars as well as human life – to have simply purchased Iraqi oil on the open market. Although you'd never know it from the media, the U.S. gets only three percent of its oil from Iraq. Our largest imports are from Canada.

The people of the United States are justly proud of our men and women in uniform and what they have accomplished. And we are especially grateful to the members of the Coalition who fought with us.

But we are saddened by the loss of life that this and every conflict brings. We mourn the deaths of all those killed during the conflict: American, British, and Iraqi.

The deaths of all these people are the price the tyranny of Saddam Hussein continues to exact on the world and on his own people by his callous and criminal refusal to live up to his international obligations as mandated by the United Nations.

Even today, foreign terrorists and political extremists continue a desperate struggle to undermine freedom, peace and tolerance in some areas of Iraq.

These terrorists and extremists have ambushed American and British service members and they have killed civilian aid workers of the United Nations. Several weeks ago they murdered a respected cleric and over a hundred Muslims at prayer -- bombing one of Islam's holiest shrines.

This violence is directed not only against the Coalition, but also against all of us who stand for freedom and progress.

The terrorists have a strategic goal -- to make us leave Iraq before our work is done. They want to shake the will of the civilized world.

This will not happen. As President Bush said on September 7: "We will continue to take direct action against the terrorists in Iraq. This is the best way to prevent future attacks on coalition forces and the Iraqi people."

Just as we did before we took action in Iraq, we are again asking the international community to help, this time in the reconstruction of Iraq. We are working on a UN Security Council resolution that would authorize the creation of a multinational force in Iraq.

Members of the United Nations now have an opportunity -- and the responsibility -- to assume a broader role in assuring that Iraq becomes a free and democratic nation. Past differences should not interfere with present duties.

We are encouraging the orderly transfer of sovereignty and authority to the Iraqi people.

Today, Iraqis have a Governing Council comprised of 25 leaders representing Iraq's diverse peoples. The Governing Council has appointed cabinet ministers to run government departments. Already more than 90 percent of towns and cities have functioning local governments working to restore basic services, provide Iraqi police to enforce the law, border guards to help secure the borders, and a new Iraqi army. Iraq is ready to take the next steps toward self-government.

As President Bush noted, "in the images of falling statues, we have witnessed the arrival of a new era. All peoples, of every culture, creed and society cherish and deserve liberty and the right to determine their own future and the future of their children. Decades of lies and intimidation have not diminished the demands of the Iraqi people for these fundamental rights."

To make such aspirations a reality in Iraq, we must now be equally successful in winning the peace. This is slow, difficult work to do.

The Coalition is bringing order to parts of Iraq that remain dangerous. Some 30 nations, our friends and allies, have sent peacekeeping forces to take on that critical task.

We are pursuing the leaders of the old regime and continue the search for chemical and biological weapons that the UN inspectors identified before they were thrown out of Iraq in 1998, but which the Iraqis refused to account for.

The UN inspectors identified significant quantities of anthrax, toxins and nerve agents that Iraq admitted having developed. To put that in perspective, one gram of anthrax in the hands of a terrorist can kill thousands of innocent people. A single suitcase full of such weapons could kill many more. These chemical and biological weapons existed, and there is no proof they were ever destroyed – so I ask you, where are they now?

It is true that we have not yet found them. But it is also true – although much of the media has chosen to ignore it – that former chief UN inspector David Kay made clear in his report last week that Iraq's WMD programs spanned more than two decades, involved thousands of people, billions of dollars, and were elaborately shielded by security and deception operations that continued even beyond the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Kay discovered dozens of WMD-related program activities and significant amounts of equipment that Iraq concealed from the United Nations during the inspections that began in late 2002.

It is logical to assume that only when the people of Iraq are confident that Saddam and his regime will never return, will those who know where those weapons are hidden, or how they have been disposed of, come forward.

Our efforts in Iraq are not just on the military side. The United States is the largest contributor of humanitarian aid for Iraq.

We have helped the World Food Program distribute 1.8 million metric tons of food to feed the people of Iraq. And in addition, the US has spent to date over \$1.5 billion on other relief to Iraq.

Organizations receiving this money include the Red Cross and Red Crescent, UNICEF, the U.N. High Commission for Refugees, International Organization for Migration, and the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

As stability and security are established throughout the country, the task of rebuilding Iraq's society will take on an increasingly civilian character. Hospitals and schools are being built where once Saddam Hussein erected palaces for he and his cronies.

Iraqi government ministries are resuming their normal functions, and international organizations -- such as the Red Cross, UN organizations and non-governmental groups - will continue to make vital contributions to Iraq's reconstruction.

The transition from dictatorship to democracy will take time, but it is worth every effort. Other nations in history have fought in foreign lands and remained to occupy and exploit them. Whether it takes six months -- as Secretary Powell has suggested as a possible timeframe for writing and ratifying a constitution -- or longer, the President has repeatedly made clear: This coalition will stay until its work is done and not one day longer.

Coalition success in Iraq followed in the steps of the Coalition victory in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, another coalition -- which included New Zealand -- acted with great deliberation, targeting the terrorists and the Taliban that harbored and supported them. In the process, we liberated millions of Afghan Muslims from oppression, restoring basic human rights such as the right of women to be educated, and even the right to listen to music of one's own choosing.

We are still there, committed to working together to help the people of Afghanistan build a nation in the manner that they want and choose. This will be another long, but necessary task.

Let me be clear: the War against Terrorism continues. Al Qaeda is damaged, but not destroyed. And al-Qaeda is not the only terrorist threat.

From Pakistan to the Philippines to the Horn of Africa, the United States and responsible members of the international community are hunting down terrorists wherever they hide. They will be brought to justice. At last count, some two-thirds of al Qaeda's senior operatives have been captured or killed.

Of course, we will never forget the victims of September the 11th. With those attacks, the terrorists and their supporters, who so despicably distorted the peaceful message of Islam, declared war on the United States and the entire Western world.

In retrospect, the tragedy of that day was the culmination of a series of earlier attacks, including the bombing of US embassies from Beirut to Nairobi, the first bombing of the World Trade Center, and the attack on the USS Cole. Our response to each of these attacks was not sufficient to dissuade the next. And we paid a terrible price.

On September 11, the world changed.

For the past 20 months, as President Bush clearly stated, "the war against terror has been proceeding according to a simple set of principles:

"Any person involved in committing or planning terrorist attacks against the American people becomes an enemy of our country, and a target of American justice.

Any person, organization, or government that supports, protects, or harbors terrorists is complicit in the murder of the innocent, and equally guilty of terrorist crimes.

"Any outlaw regime that has ties to terrorist groups and seeks or possesses weapons of mass destruction is a grave danger to the civilized world -- and will be confronted."

Having said that, let me also add that any country that works and sacrifices for freedom will find a loyal friend in the United States of America.

Let me stress that the use of force has been -- and remains -- our last resort. Yet the United States will respond to threats against our security and will defend our people. Our actions have been focused and deliberate.

Using all the tools at our disposal -- diplomacy, law enforcement, intelligence, military and finance -- we are working with a broad coalition of nations that understand the threat and our shared responsibility to meet it.

The war on terror is not over, but it is not endless. We do not know when the day of final victory will come, but we have seen the turning of the tide.

Our action in Iraq has also created the possibility of a new strategic environment in the Middle East.

In April, the United States, in close cooperation with Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations, presented to Israel and the Palestinians a "roadmap" for peace.

This roadmap is but a starting point toward achieving a secure State of Israel and a viable, peaceful, democratic Palestine. Implementing the roadmap depends upon the good faith efforts and contributions of both sides. The tragic continuing violence benefits no one.

It is our strong hope that Israelis and Palestinians will work together, with us and with the international community, to immediately end that violence and return to a path of peace. We can all play a role in bringing peace to this area, but only Israelis and Palestinians can finally end the nightmare of retribution.

Let me now turn to another major challenge facing the United States and the international community. This one is much closer to New Zealand. I mean, of course, the hard work currently underway to find a peaceful solution to the international community's serious concerns about North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

A nuclear North Korea could change the face of Northeast Asia.

It would undermine the security and stability that have provided the underpinnings for the region's economic prosperity. It could trigger a nuclear arms race that no responsible nation in the region wants. Such an arms race would end the prospects for a lasting peace and settlement on the Korean Peninsula.

Let me remind you of the history of this issue. In 1993, North Korea provoked a very serious situation on the Peninsula when it announced its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. That crisis culminated in the 1994 US-North Korea Agreed Framework.

Last summer it became apparent that for several years North Korea had been attempting to covertly acquire a uranium enrichment program for nuclear weapons.

Our discovery of this program, and North Korea's refusal to dismantle it, forced us to set aside a policy we had hoped would put us on a path towards resolving all of our concerns with North Korea. That path would have offered North Korea an improved relationship with the United States and participation in the international community, with all the benefits and responsibilities that entails.

Instead of reversing its position, however, North Korea has escalated the situation. It expelled International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors, then announced its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

More recently, North Korea has re-started a nuclear reactor, conducted test firings of a developmental cruise missile, and intercepted an unarmed US aircraft operating in international airspace.

Each of these provocations is designed to blackmail the United States and to intimidate our friends and allies. But President Bush remains convinced that a peaceful solution can be found through diplomacy.

To that end, in April the United States participated in a meeting in Beijing with the Chinese and the North Koreans. In late August, the United States engaged in six-nation talks, again in Beijing.

North Korea must understand that we will not be threatened and we will not respond to threats.

Secretary Powell spoke clearly to them when he said that North Korea should not have "the slightest impression" that the United States and its partners, and the nations in the region, will be intimidated by bellicose statements, threats or actions.

What North Korea wants is for us to accept that its nuclear weapons are a matter for discussion between just North Korea and the US. But this is not a U.S.-North Korean problem. We tried the bilateral approach ten years ago by negotiating the Agreed Framework. And we found that North Korea could not be trusted.

In fact, North Korea found it easier to abrogate its commitments to the United States under the Agreed Framework, since doing so would risk condemnation by just a single country. This time, a new and more comprehensive approach is required.

We are absolutely committed to a multilateral approach and a multilateral solution to this problem.

Nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula are a threat to every nation in the region as well as to the United States.

It is for that reason we have insisted that all of the nations in the region play a role. One thing is absolutely clear from recent meetings – the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, and Australia, among others – strongly believe that the peninsula must not become nuclear.

But let me underscore here that the United States also fully recognizes the human tragedy unfolding in North Korea.

We are one of the world's biggest donors of humanitarian assistance to the North and President Bush has stated clearly that the US will not use food as a weapon.

If North Korea abides by its obligations, we are prepared to work with the regime for a better future for its people, for a revitalized process of reconciliation between North and South, a new relationship between the United States and North Korea, and a new era of peace, stability, and prosperity in Northeast Asia.

On a brighter note, let me now turn to a final topic, one that I am particularly fond of talking about -- the bilateral relationship between the United States and New Zealand.

I am pleased to report that the relationship between the U. S. and New Zealand is fundamentally strong, deep and healthy.

It is a long-standing friendship that has withstood the test of time, and – yes – occasional differences.

There are always some disagreements – sometimes strong disagreements – in any relationship; I will talk about some of those in just a moment. But for the record, let me reiterate that the long-term prognosis is very, very, very good.

I stress this, because all too often when I give these talks, some pundits and commentators miss the forest for the trees and while focusing on the immediate, seem to forget the fundamentals.

The bottom-line is that the US-Kiwi relationship is a good news story. At its core, it is a relationship built on a bedrock of shared values, culture, language and history. Our two peoples espouse and cherish the principles of democracy and freedom, the rule of law and justice, tolerance and respect.

The relationship is cemented through long-standing and still-growing ties between Americans and Kiwis.

It is strengthened through business, tourism, and professional, academic and cultural exchanges.

We stand together on many other issues as well, from protecting the environment – to our efforts to improve the global free market economic system. Our representatives cooperated in launching the WTO Doha Development Round. Cancun may have been a disappointment, but I am confident we will continue to work together towards the success of this mutually shared goal.

Trade between our two nations is robust. You send us US2 billion dollars worth of goods and we send you just a little less in return. We are your second largest trading partner.

That raises a bilateral issue that has been much in the news recently.

We have heard, and we understand, New Zealand's interest in a bilateral free trade agreement with the United States. Our position on this issue has been consistent throughout. So what I am about to say will come as no surprise to you, but bears repeating just the same: the United States Government is not prepared to schedule bilateral trade negotiations at this time.

I know that you understand that many factors go into the decision to seek a Free Trade Agreement.

And, naturally, one of the key tests is the potential benefit any bilateral agreement will have for each side. We need to look at what the benefits would be, not just for New Zealanders, but also for the citizens, both producers and consumers, of the United States.

As I've said, trade between us is a strong point in the relationship.

But I think it's important to note that it is not helpful to unduly raise expectations about an FTA. For now, both sides will continue to look at the matter. And regardless of the outcome of the FTA issue, and despite the setbacks at Cancun, I remain confident that free trade will flourish through the WTO, and our trade relations will continue to expand and thrive.

Now, some here have tried to link New Zealand's ban on nuclear-propelled ship visits to the lack of a US commitment on an FTA.

We are, of course, aware that recently there has been discussion of this issue in the press and in the community at large.

Arguments by some that Washington has resurrected this issue in a bid to alter New Zealand policy are dead wrong. We understand and respect New Zealand's right to determine its own security policies.

We have never made the nuclear issue a test of our friendship or of our cooperation. Our robust trade and close cooperation in any number of areas bears witness to this.

Yet New Zealand's anti-nuclear legislation does place limits on our relationship. It impedes closer cooperation in some areas. Friends and allies are not the same thing.

Like you, we would like to see the end of this bilateral disagreement. But contrary to the views of some, the United States is not going to just "get over it."

Let me be clear – the nuclear issue does not define the US-New Zealand relationship – even such a serious disagreement cannot overwhelm the ties that bind us. But it is not cost-free.

The nuclear issue inevitably colors important policy decisions on both sides, limits the scope for further deepening of cooperation in key areas, and plays an unhelpful role in how we respond to one another. Twenty years on, a re-examination of this issue could benefit us all.

As for events just passed, I tell you frankly that we were saddened by New Zealand's decision not to participate in the liberation of the Iraqi people.

For the first time in our shared history, New Zealanders were not with us in a major military conflict.

Traditional allies -- Australians, British and Americans -- fought side by side in the cause of freedom and in defense of our common values, as we have many times before.

In the wake of the cowardly attacks of September 11, I personally witnessed the outpouring of heartfelt sympathy from all across New Zealand, and I've repeatedly conveyed our appreciation for your contributions to the liberation of Afghanistan and the fight against terrorism.

Even now, New Zealand men and women are actively participating in the War on Terrorism, and your government has sent a team of engineers to help with the reconstruction of Iraq. These are important and welcome contributions.

So I hope you will understand if I say to you, with some sorrow, that it felt as if there were someone missing when we finally moved against Saddam Hussein. But that too was your decision, and we respect it.

To the consternation of those who sought to label US resolve "unilateralist," over 40 nations joined with us in shouldering the heavy responsibilities of freeing Iraq as members of the international coalition, while others tried to obstruct those necessary actions.

Some people here, and elsewhere, have suggested that the underlying issue was a choice between the United Nations and the United States. For us, that is a false dichotomy. Let's be clear: it was the members of the Coalition who ensured that the 17 resolutions passed by the United Nations Security Council were, in the end, not made irrelevant by the defiance of a corrupt, tyrannical regime.

It is also inaccurate to suggest that the Coalition went forward without regard for Security Council authorization.

I realize that technical points will continue to be debated, but there is no contradicting the fact that the Coalition took action in support of 17 UN resolutions, including the unanimously adopted 1441, which explicitly offered Saddam Hussein one last chance to come clean or "face serious consequences." He ignored those warnings, as he ignored them all for over 10 years. And now he has paid the price.

But as the Secretary of State recently said, "Now we have to come together... to help the Iraqi people take their place in the world as a free, stable self-governing country."

We welcome New Zealand's offer, through the United Nations and other organizations such as the Red Cross, to help Iraq and its people. I applaud New Zealand's latest announcement that it will provide much-needed assistance and training with mine clearing.

I know New Zealand is a generous member of the international community, and I am confident you will join with us in helping to provide the critical support and assistance needed to rebuild Iraq and secure a better future for its children.

Winning the peace in Iraq and the war on terrorism is in the best interests of all of us, and it will take all of us working together in order to succeed. Together, I am confident that we will succeed.

Of course, our relationship is much more than just any one issue. And we can certainly go on as we have for decades now, as very good friends. But I would challenge both our nations to optimize that relationship, to take it to another level.

We don't want to miss any opportunities. To quote the great American poet Robert Frost, I'd like our two nations to walk "the road less-travelled."

With honesty, understanding, and hard work, we can create a relationship where the United States and New Zealand are allies in the broadest sense, not merely in security terms, but across the spectrum in economics, business, science, and the environment. For this to happen, difficult decisions will have to be made; compromises must be reached. But it is a goal worth working for, and one to which I dedicate my remaining time here in New Zealand. To put it simply, we must 'Let the Relationship Be all it Can Be.'

As our two nations develop a vision of our respective roles and responsibilities in a world that has dramatically changed over the past decades, we owe it to the citizens of both nations to take that less-travelled road and "...not follow where the path may lead... (but) go instead where there is no path, and leave a trail."

I hope you will join me in blazing that trail.

Thank you.